

WANTED!

A FISHERIES
BOARD FOR
THE
MARITIME
PROVINCES



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Fisheries Board for the Maritime Provinces.

Its adoption here would be in line with the policy which has proved most successful in the development of the fishing industry in other countries.

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THE present is a time when we should consider where we stand in the development of Canada, and ascertain what we can do to push our development so that the East may not be altogether overshadowed by the rising greatness of the West. With this in view it is the purpose of this article to give a short review of the use we have made of our natural resources in order to arouse public opinion to the necessity of taking immediate steps to stop the present drifting methods in connection with the fisheries, which can well be considered the natural industry that has so far had the least consideration, and this notwithstanding the admission on all sides of the benefits that would result from the proper administration of laws and regulations along with an energetic educative policy on the part of those in authority.

That the people of the Maritime Provinces, and Nova Scotia in particular, are becoming fully alive to the absolute necessity of conserving and developing their great natural resources, is instanced by the activity of the Nova Scotia Government and the good work of Professor Cumming with regard to Agriculture. The Nova Scotia Lumbermen's Association, being alive to the threatened extinction of our forest wealth, has been instrumental in having such legislation passed and such action taken as will ensure the permanence of the lumbering industry. Turning to the mining industries, we find that we have cause for pride in the greatly increased output of our coal

mines, and the prospect of the early development of our immense deposits of iron ore. Such attention has been paid to these great natural industries that we find the population engaged therein to be on the increase, and particularly in the case of mining.

But what do we find when we come to consider the history and present standing of our fishing industry? While other countries have adopted a progressive policy for their fisheries, Canadians have been and apparently are content to allow this great natural asset to remain neglected, burdened with unkept laws and regulations, and without any progressive educative policy, such as has been applied to our other great natural resources. The result is that our fisheries are retrograding, our fishing population is depleted, and a general demoralization is found in practically every branch of the industry. These facts are generally admitted at Ottawa.

A short review of the conditions now prevailing in Eastern Canada will conclusively demonstrate the necessity of prompt action in order to conserve and develop the various branches of the Canadian fisheries. It is useless to turn to the official returns as given in the annual blue book issued by the Department of Marine and Fisheries, as these are acknowledged, even by the Departmental officers themselves, to be so inaccurate as to be practically useless. The returns are not merely mostly guesswork, but in some instances show such gross exaggeration that it is impossible to accept them as indicating even approximately the true value of the product.

DRY FISH INDUSTRY.

It is generally admitted that the catch of fish in Eastern Canada as dried for export, has been steadily diminishing. The year 1907 saw some forty sail less engaged in the Bank and Bay fisheries out of Lunenburg than in 1906, and this year (1908) shows no improvement. Every sail less in our Banking fleet means a loss of at least twenty men to the industry, and these men, not finding other employment at home, emigrate to the United States and the West.

The chief reason for this decline is the increasing difficulty experienced by the fishermen in securing the necessary supply of bait, a difficulty that could cer-

tainly to some extent be overcome by the scientific operation of bait freezers under the supervision of a Fisheries Board, free from political control. It is evident too, that a great deal could be done in an educative way with regard to practical information about the movements of fish in our waters and the best methods of curing. While in certain sections the shore catch of codfish, etc., used in the dry state, may have held its own, it is safe to say that there has been a falling off of at least thirty per cent. in the shore codfish industry also in the last twenty-five years. Is it not worth an effort to try and put new life into the dry fish industry? Under present conditions it is quite safe to say that the next census will show a further decrease in our fishing population.

PICKLED FISH.

It is in the handling of pickled fish, however, that the utmost necessity can be shown for the adoption of better methods, such as were brought about under Board supervision in Scotland and elsewhere. The first thing to consider is the package. Under the present system of administration there is no such thing as a standard pickled-fish barrel. While large quantities of barrel staves cut to a standard size are exported from Canada to Scotland, for use in the immense Herring industry of that country, Canada herself has been quite satisfied to have her pickled-fish products packed in barrels that are a disgrace to the trade, and entail nothing but trouble and loss to the various handlers. A large part of the mackerel catch of Nova Scotia is "jumped" into herring barrels, resulting in loss of weight, deterioration of the fish, and a shrinkage in value of the product of anywhere from \$1.00 to \$4.00 per barrel. The lack of uniformity in the pack of herring as regards the package, quality and weight in the barrels, is too well known to need further elaboration. Standard packages should be established, and all concerned should be educated to the necessity of using such packages, and to the curing and packing of their fish with as much uniformity as possible, so that instead of our product selling mostly in markets taking low grades of fish, with corresponding results, it would command prices such as are obtained by the trade in

countries that have adopted standards. The stigma that at present attaches to Canadian pickled fish in the consuming markets of the world would then be removed.

The adoption of legal standards of package and quality does not mean the forcing of the Scotch or any other method of curing upon the fishermen or merchants, for outside of this there is room for a vast improvement under the present methods. As things are now, the pickled fish trade, both domestic and foreign, is in a state of stagnation caused by the uncertainty of the buyer as to what he is likely to get when he buys Canadian pickled fish, together with the fact that he knows that, even if the weight and quality are all right, he is liable to a heavy loss owing to the wretched packages the fish are packed in, necessitating constant watchfulness on his part in order to keep pickle on the fish. With the existence of this state of affairs it is not to be wondered at that the domestic trade have practically given up handling pickled fish, and that merchants are constantly having to turn down orders for the American markets which require guaranteed goods, and rely on the West Indies to take the bulk of the product. In the West India markets the inferiority of the pack, short weight, etc., are more or less accepted, being discounted by the low prices that are paid. There is no question that our dwindling and demoralized pickled-fish trade can be put on the same satisfactory basis as exists in European countries if we adopt an educative and progressive policy such as is in force in Scotland under the Board system of administration.

LOBSTERS.

The most important of the fisheries of the Atlantic seaboard at present is the lobster fishery. The depletion of the lobster in other countries, due undoubtedly to some extent to the destructiveness of man, is what makes this industry so valuable to Canada, until to-day it is our boast that, as a commercial commodity, from a canning standpoint, we produce fully ninety per cent. (90 p. c.) of the world's annual output. It should be our aim to surround this industry, which is of so high a degree of

importance, with such regulations as will not only perpetuate it, but even increase the output.

There are many opinions as to what brings about the greatest destruction of the lobster with us. So eminent an authority as Professor Herrick, who in the last decade made a comprehensive research, covering two or three years, of the life and habits of the lobster, recommended to the American Government, at the conclusion of his researches, that in order to save this fish from complete destruction, it would be necessary to prevent the catching of all lobsters under ten and a half inches. During the year of 1907, he has, however, placed himself on record in favour of a complete change in his original decision, and now proposes that the regulations be so changed as to permit only of the catching of lobsters below ten and a half inches. This change in attitude on the part of Professor Herrick was brought about by the fact that the United States Fish Commission has been spending large amounts of money annually for the purpose of restoring the depleted waters of Maine and Massachusetts, and while there has been a small increase in the quantity caught, the results are totally unsatisfactory. It would therefore seem that further scientific research is absolutely necessary, and that if such research were conducted along proper lines with the aid of results obtained from practical observation, a large amount of information would be gathered, upon which laws could be constructed having for their object the preservation of this most important fishery.

That the diversified opinions of the many writers of the day can hardly attain to practical results must be acknowledged when the lack of scientific information is so evident. If, as has been heralded, it is possible in hatcheries to save forty-six per cent (46 p.c.) of the eggs of the lobsters (heretofore two per cent. (2 p.c.) has been considered the basis) it must be apparent that the supply of lobsters can be increased very materially; and as the process which brought about such results is a very simple one, the benefits to be realized very far outweigh the cost, and it is to such a question as this that a board system of administration would lend itself with very great success.

It is unnecessary to recite that the regulations at present on the statute books of Canada, with reference to the lobster fishery, are not enforced.

There is absolutely no disagreement between the fishermen and the canners on the one common ground of the preservation of the industry. Whatever measures will bring about an increase in the production of lobsters will be of mutual benefit, and it is towards this common end that all interests should unite; but to allow the matter to drift as has been done for some years past, must mean eventually the destruction of the lobster industry almost in its entirety. What both fishermen and packers require is a progressive policy, progressive administration towards a common benefit, and short of this we must not stop.

The marvellous fecundity of the lobster goes a long way to prevent possible extinction, but the uncertainty of their permanency, deduced from the experiences of other countries, should be put beyond doubt. Laws based on knowledge, not guess work, are absolutely necessary. Then the fearless and progressive carrying out of such, not worked out from a centre one thousand miles distant, but in the heart of the industry, would do much for the benefit of all interested.

OYSTERS.

A glance at the oyster branch of the industry will, we think, convince the most skeptical of the absolute necessity of bringing into existence some system of administration that will rescue that as well as other branches of the fisheries from total destruction. At the present time the Maritime Provinces cannot be said to have an oyster fishery at all; and this, notwithstanding the fact that Captain E. Kempt, Oyster Expert of the Fisheries Department at Ottawa, has demonstrated beyond doubt, that we have most extensive cultivatable areas all over the Maritime Provinces where the waters contain the necessary chemical properties for the growth and nutrition of this delicious bivalve. The fact that in many places natural beds of oysters once existed where now practically none are obtainable, demonstrates the extent of the destruction that has taken place. Some nine or ten years ago a few small oysters were plant-

ed in the Annapolis River, where they quickly grew to a large size. This planting was done by the Department, but no attempt was made to catch the spat or young oysters at the proper season, or to protect the bed; consequently, it was soon depleted by picnickers. Piles of oyster shells on the shore testify to the facts. This is an instance of what could be carried out in many, if not all, of the bays and inlets of the Maritime Provinces, either where natural beds do or do not at present exist. Intelligent cultivation would enlarge their production a hundred fold. The most superficial study of the oyster industry as carried on in other countries will clearly show its enormous value, where it has been intelligently conducted, and it will just as clearly demonstrate that where natural beds are dragged and furrowed by indiscriminate fishing at any or all times, it is easily possible to destroy the fishery.

CLAM BEDS.

The clam beds of the Maritime Provinces are being depleted in many cases to supply bait to foreign fishermen. Under the supervision of fishery officers, having the improvement of the fisheries at heart, steps should be taken to conserve our clam beds for the benefit of all concerned, and particularly from the fishermen's standpoint.

THE FISHERY BOARD IDEA AND WHAT HAS BEEN DONE IN SCOTLAND AND ELSEWHERE.

The idea of a Fishery Board for the proper preservation, protection and development of the fishing industry, is one that has already proved its worth. One hundred years ago the pickled fish industry of Scotland was in practically the same unsatisfactory condition and position as is that of the Maritime Provinces to-day. A popular agitation brought about the appointment by the Government of Great Britain, of Royal Commissioners for the betterment and control of the industry in Scotland. These Royal Commissioners were succeeded by what is now known as the Fishery Board for Scotland, which, if judged by results, is the best and most effective method of fishery administration in the world. The laws enacted upon the recommendations of the Board are simple

and effective, and have, together with the thoroughly proficient and capable staff of officers under direction of the Board, brought the industry in Scotland to its present profitable condition.

Twenty-five or thirty years ago the Government of Norway awakened to the possibilities of improvement in their fishery, and sent capable men to all the European countries to study the situation, and report. On these reports it was decided to adopt the Scotch system, including the Board. As a result, the fisheries of Norway have been put in the front rank among the fisheries of the world.

About seven years ago Iceland adopted the Fishery Board system, patterned after the Scotch, with even a more complete system of inspection than is carried out by any other government, inasmuch as they grant a certificate with every parcel of pickled or dried fish for export to a foreign country. This experiment has proved so effective and correct that the trading in European countries is actually done on these certificates.

In the United States the administration of the fisheries is carried out through separate State Commissions, whose efforts have resulted in the immense development of various branches of the industry, notably in the case of oysters. Laws have been made to suit the various local conditions, and have been so effectively carried out that oyster culture is now on a systematic and scientific basis; the output constantly increasing and the value well up in the millions of dollars.

The following particulars in regard to the Fisheries Board of Scotland, will, it is hoped, help to arouse those interested in this important industry to the need of concerted action towards the adoption of the Board system of administration in Canada.

The Scottish Board, after which the other Boards are patterned, is now composed of nine members, three of whom represent the fishermen, three the merchants, curers, packers and exporters, one a scientist, one a legal advisor, and the Chairman, who is appointed by the Government. The only paid member is the Chairman, the others getting only travelling fees. The Chairman is appointed for life.

The other members for terms of five years, and are eligible for re-election.

The Board has complete control of an efficient office staff at headquarters, and also the entire outside staff for the conduct of its affairs. It has entire control of the standard of package, cure, selection, and grading of all fish offering for inspection, which is optional. All its appointments are by competitive examination, and promotions are made according to ability. The staff of inspectors are men who have had not less than five years active experience as coopers and curers, and also have passed the ordinary civil service examination with not less than fifty per cent. of marks.

The Board keeps in close touch with all the established markets by sending inspectors to ascertain, from importers and distributors in foreign countries, what improvements can be made to make the goods more acceptable to the consumer. In this way, through the Board, the consumer is brought into touch with the producer.

The Board, through its scientific department, gives most extensive reports on all matters that have a direct or even an indirect bearing on the commercial side of the industry.

The legal member of the Board looks after the legality of the Board's actions, and has control of counsel who may be in any way in the employ of the Board.

The Board as a whole recommends new laws or changes in existing laws, and is clothed with the authority for the carrying out of the laws as they exist. It has nothing whatever to do with how, when and where a fisherman shall sell his catch, nor does it interfere with any curer or exporter in the marketing of his goods. It does, however, establish a standard up to which it is desired that all the product of the industry should come, and when that is done it affixes its brands, which is a guarantee that the goods are up to the standard.

It also seeks out the best and most modern information on all questions in any way connected with production and methods of handling, and publishes the same for the benefit of all concerned. The system of collecting statistics under the Scottish

Board is the most complete extant, and is accredited with being as nearly accurate as it is possible to get.

The above is a general outline of the Board system as carried out in Scotland. It is along these lines that the establishment of a Board for the Maritime Provinces is advocated, for the preservation and development of the fisheries.

NOW IS THE TIME TO ACT.

It must appear to all interested that the time has come when the system of administration which has brought the fisheries of Scotland, Norway and Iceland, up to such a degree of success, should be given a trial in Canada, and that a body of informed and progressive men representing all interests should be able to devise a workable scheme applicable to our Canadian conditions. In regard to our fishery administration, we stand to-day where Scotland was one hundred years ago. There it took many years to develop the system that is now so successfully administered. The lifting of our Canadian fisheries out of the present rut means a lot of hard work and infinite trouble on the part of those willing to make the effort. We have, however, the benefit of the successes and failures as made in other countries. The question is, are we willing to rise to the occasion, leaving no stone unturned until this great national industry is put on such a basis that we can point with pride to its improved conditions and progress? Outside of the material benefits that must result from the improvement of conditions, there will be the satisfaction of knowing that we have had some share in the upbuilding of Canada, and increased pride in our goodly heritage, "the Provinces by the Sea."



